1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
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Georgia

to give way to a growth of towering oaks; then it joined again, resuming its winding trail through the quiet, shadowed countryside.

The little settlement now known as Harrington was formerly the property of the Demere family. A little less than a mile north of this settlement was Harrington Hall, home of Raymond Demere, who came to this country with Oglethorpe after serving ten years under Lord Harrington at Gibraltar.

To the left of the road was a small unpainted store operated by Ryna Johnson's daughter with whom she lived. Various advertisements on the front of the small building gave splashes of color to the green of trees and foliage.

Set back from the store was Ryna's house, surrounded by an expanse of short grass upon which a horse was grazing. The house was weathered with age, as were the vertical boards of the fence that enclosed the garden; here and there in the fence a new unpainted board, regardless of length, had replaced an old, and the top presented an irregular, jagged pattern. The cabin was the usual two-room affair but with a hall through the center and a lean-to in the back. The walls were papered with newspapers and, although there was a motley collection of objects and furniture, everything was scrupulously clean.

Ryna * was blind from cataracts and had not been feeling very well; so she had just got up from bed. Although her body was bent and very feeble, her mind was still clear.

"Ise bout eighty-five yeahs ole, but I caahn tell zackly. I belong tuh duh Coupers wen I wuk on duh plantation. It bin sech a long time I mos stop studyin bout dem days. But I membuh we use tuh hab good times."

In answer to our inquiry regarding any Africans whom she had known during plantation days, Ryna told us, "Alexanduh, Jummy, an William, dey is all African. I membuh ole William well an he tell me lots bout times in Africa. Dey

* *Ryna Johnson, Harrington, St. Simons Island.*

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
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South Carolina
Johns Island

Mrs. Betsy Pinckney

EACH LEAF ON THIS TREE WILL HEAL A NATION

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I sick one time, in 1894. I sick 'til my mother and father give me up. Typhoid fever, gracious God! Oh that's a good God. I can prove it!

I was to go into the hospital the next day. There was a door, just like I looking on it now. I see a white man come through and walk just past my bed. He come and just look at me. Didn't say nothing, then go out. 1894.

And when the day was clean, the white gentleman come through the door again; I didn't know how he come in the house, but there he was. And he had on a blue gown, and hair drop on he shoulder. Yes sir! And he come to my bed, ask me, "What will you have me to do?"

And you know what I tell him? I say, "Please sir, could you read the fifteenth chapter and the psalm, 'The Lord Is My Shepherd'?"

He say, "Have you a prayer book?" Ask me just like I asking you a question!

I say, "Yes, sir."

He read the fifteenth chapter, the first six verse. Then after he done read that, he turn to the Twenty-Third Psalm, and he read it for me.

And he take me and he carry me down to a river. My spirit go on down to the river. Jesus! And when I get there, he said, "This tree bears twelve manna fruit. Every leaf on this tree will heal a nation." Gracious God have mercy!

Well sir, I wake up. I ain't seen when the man gone, but I know he come and carry me to that tree, down to that river side, and he tell me, "Each leaf on this tree will heal a nation."

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Never sick so again yet! And that's the truth. Gracious God have mercy! Don't tell me don't serve God, because I going serve God until he say "well done." Yes ma'am, "well done."

505 weekly to bring persons to the mainland. Most inhabitants
[491] over forty remember these Saturday ferry trips to Charleston or to other islands to buy and sell their produce, arts and crafts.

433 Historically, the islanders were self reliant. Rice, indigo, and long staple cotton were resources that flourished well on the fertile soil, and brought substantial prices on the market. The ocean provided an abundant supply of
[226] crab, fish and shrimp, and the children learned the art of casting and netting at a very early age. Because most of
823 the islanders were fishermen, the ocean provided a topic
521 of interest and often evoked many natural responses ranging from earliest childhood encouters to near death feats.

132 Few Europeans inhabited the islands because of the heat
164 and the threat of malaria. According to Nichols (1976:20),
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> an important factor in the low numbers of Europeans was their susceptibility to the malaria-bearing mosquito which thrived in the fresh-water swamplands. During the summer months and fall, which consituted the malaria season, the landowners moved to homes on the ocean or further inland. West Africans, on the other hand, had a genetic tolerance for the malaria parasite.

175 During the period from 1730 to 1840, Blacks
161 outnumbered Whites by a substantial margin. For example, in 1800 there were 2,150 Whites and 12,400 Blacks in Georgetown County. By 1840, the county contained 2,200 Whites and 18,000 Blacks (Jackson et al. 1974:33). Thus a geographical isolation, social and
197 economic independence, and marginal contact with speakers of
177 English outside the Creole community nurtured an environ-

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

long canoe, hollowed out of the trunk of a single cypress and rowed by six negroes, who were singing loudly and keeping time to the stroke of their oars." He went on to say: "For many a mile we saw no habitations, and the solitude was profound; but our black oarsmen made the woods echo to their song. One of them taking the lead, first improvised a verse, paying compliments to his master's family, and to a celebrated black beauty of the neighborhood, who was compared to the 'red bird.' The other five then joined in the chorus, always repeating the same words. Occasionally they struck up a hymn, in which the most sacred subjects were handled with strange familiarity, and which, though nothing irreverent was meant, sounded oddly to our ears, and, when following a love ditty, almost profane."

Lyell's account of his canoe trip from Hopeton to visit Mr. Couper's summer residence on St. Simon's Island, fifteen miles distant, is of interest for several reasons. In describing the Negro houses on Butler Island, where the party landed on their way, he tells us they "were neat, and whitewashed, all floored with wood, each with an apartment called the hall, two sleeping rooms, and a loft for the children" —which is contrary to what Fanny Kemble had written about the selfsame houses a few years earlier. He also mentioned seeing ricks of rice raised on props five feet high, to protect them from the sea, which, during hurricanes, has been known to rise five or six feet. His observations on the mental development of the slaves are particularly significant: "It is evident that on these rice farms, where the negroes associate with scarcely any whites, except the overseer and his family, and have but little intercourse with the slaves of other estates, they must remain far more stationary than where, as in a large part of Georgia, they are about equal in number to the whites, or even form a minority. . . . In Glynn County, where we are now residing, there are no less than four thousand negroes to seven hundred whites,[24] whereas in Georgia generally there are only 281,000 in a population of 691,000 or more whites than colored people."

I give these figures because they explain why more distinctive slave songs can be found in the rice swamps and cotton plantations of the adjoining sea islands than in the Piedmont section where Anglo-Saxon influence has always predominated. In all probability we have the malaria mosquito and the absentee landlords to thank for this. In Africa the black race had developed an immunity to malaria—which they

[24] About the same ratio as when I first went to St. Simon's. Charles Spalding Wylly states that in 1810 almost every acre of arable land on St. Simon's was under cultivation. There were fourteen plantations and a slave population of about 1200.

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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are now losing—and the resistance of the slaves to "the miasma of the rice fields" enabled them to take care of the crop during the "pestilential season" with the minimum of white supervision. In consequence, all white residents who could leave [25] fled at nightfall to the "salts"—as the sea marshes were called—or to the dry and higher pine land, whichever might be nearer, and the Negroes were left very much to themselves. It requires no stretch of the imagination to assume that the beloved rhythms and dances that had been brought from Africa were kept alive in just this way. For which let me say—God be praised! I have never been able to believe that all virtue was vested in the white man or his music.

Another statement of Lyell's is so accurate that it should be given here. He tells us that "The slaves identify themselves with the master, and their sense of their own importance rises with his success in life." Mrs. Shadman, who knew all the ex-slaves on St. Simon's, told me that Maum Rhina at Cannon's Point was heard to say: "I hol' my head jus' as high as my Missus. I'se a Wylly nig'ah." The Wylly Negroes always felt they were superior to those of the Hazzards, who lived on the adjoining plantation. The feeling of animosity that has persisted for more than a century among the descendants of the slaves of the two plantations may be because of the duel over a boundary dispute, in which young Wylly was killed by his neighbor, Dr. Hazzard.

In spite of the Negroes being passionately fond of music and dancing, the activity of the Baptist and Methodist missionaries was such before 1845 that Lyell tells us: "On the Hopeton Plantation above twenty violins have been silenced." The ban on secular music was the same in the vicinity of Beaufort, South Carolina. The editors of *Slave Songs of the United States* reported that they never saw a musical instrument among the Port Royal freedmen, and mentioned that the last violin, owned by a "wordly man," disappeared from Coffin's Point in 1861. They expressed regret that they could not obtain enough secular songs to make a division by themselves, and went on to say: "It is . . . already becoming difficult to obtain these songs. Even the 'spirituals' are going out of use on the plantations, superseded by the new style of religious music, 'closely imitated from the white people.' " The statement made by the editors that "The same songs are used for rowing as for shouting," holds true on the coast of Georgia, and it is interesting to find that the identical tunes were favorites the length of the sea-island chain between the Peedee and the Satilla Rivers. (Map, page xxxii.)

The similarity of the speech, customs, and music of the Gullah Negroes through-

[25] The terms of the overseer's contract required his presence on the plantation except under urgent circumstances.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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tages in Scotland." In each was a chest, a table, two or three chairs, and a few shelves for crockery.[44]

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Although it was customary for sea-island planters to provide their Negro quarters with floors, occasionally temporary quarters were built without floors as a means of combating some contagious disease. For instance, after the slaves on his plantation had suffered from a disastrous attack of Asiatic cholera, E. M. Whaley, of Little Edisto Island, burned the old quarters and built temporary ones without floors at a considerable distance from the former location. It was to the planter's interest to keep his "people" well and as comfortable as he deemed consistent with his plantation economy, for a slave was the most valuable piece of property he possessed. Cattle were valued at $7 a head, a yoke of oxen and wagon at $45, a mule at $100, but a prime slave might bring as high as $2,000.

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MEDICAL CARE OF THE SLAVE

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Sea-island planters, aside from humanitarian reasons, carefully guarded their people's health because it was good business to do so. In the lists of rules which the planter included in his contract with his overseer, there invariably occurred specific instructions concerning the medical care which the Negroes should receive. P. C. J. Weston's instructions to his overseer on his rice plantation in South Carolina began with the statement, "The Proprietor, in the first place, wishes the Overseer most distinctly to understand that his first object is to be, under all circumstances, the care and well being of the Negroes." The instructions further read: "Strong medicines should be left to the

[44] Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 249, 264.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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offered his services to another planter in that vicinity at $1.25 a head.[51] On St. Helena Island at least four of the planters were doctors.

Negroes seem to have been especially susceptible to cholera, "peripneumonia," and dysentery, or bloody flux, as it was most commonly called. When once cholera appeared among the Negroes, it usually could not be controlled until several had died. In 1852 and again in 1854 cholera swept off many of the best slaves on Louis Manigault's plantation on Argyle Island, Georgia. After these losses, Manigault bought 771 acres of "high land" on the Georgia main which he used partly for cholera camps and for the summer residence of the Negro children.[52] In 1855 when about fifty cases of cholera appeared among James Hamilton Couper's Hopeton plantation Negroes, he wrote to his son in alarm, "The causes I cannot discover, they [the Negroes] live at various settlements, are employed in every kind of work, and have the same food."[53]

Couper considered "peripneumonia" almost as alarming as cholera.[54] "Peripneumonia" was the ante-bellum term for pleuropneumonia, a combination of pleurisy and pneumonia. Although it did not occur in epidemics, it was nearly always fatal to the slaves. Although dysentery did not always appear among the plantation Negroes in a severe form, in 1857 Henry A. Middleton, Jr., lost forty of his people on Weehaw plantation, near Georgetown, from an epidemic of this disease.[55] After the epidemic,

[51] Phillips, *Plantation and Frontier*, I, 166.
[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 143.
[53] Couper-Wylly Papers, March 9, 1855.
[54] *Ibid.*, April 13, 1857.
[55] Weehaw Plantation Book.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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the village was moved about three-fourths of a mile away to the pine woods and the houses built farther apart.

Smallpox and yellow fever also caused the planters considerable alarm, although there were more widespread efforts to prevent these infectious diseases than others to which the Negroes were subject. The state quarantine laws greatly reduced the number of cases of yellow fever and the planter's general use of vaccine lessened the epidemics of smallpox. Henry A. Middleton, Jr.'s, Weehaw Plantation Book indicates that he regularly had the black children vaccinated.

Although sea-island planters usually considered that the winter months were the hardest for the Negroes and the summer months for the whites, the Negroes also suffered from malaria, although not to the same extent as the whites. In 1857 James Hamilton Couper wrote to his son James that the illness of another son was "induced by the same state of the atmosphere which has caused a very general malaria of typhoid fever among the Negroes." For four weeks during this attack there was an average of forty ill in the plantation hospital.[56]

The death of a trusted slave often brought a deal of sorrow into the planter's family. In recounting the deaths on the plantation in a letter to his son, Couper wrote in 1857:

> To myself personally the most painful loss has been that of poor old Sandy and his wife Joan. . . . I requested Mr. Brown to read the funeral service at his grave; and your mother, myself and the family attended. He was an honest, faithful and good man; and I part with him as with a devoted and tried friend. He was

[56] Couper-Wylly Papers, April 13, 1857.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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567 853 862 After eight months the child was put on a diet of vegetables, milk, and starches prepared, on the best managed plantation, by a special cook assigned to that task. On Weehaw plantation the children's allowance was given out every morning and cooked for them three times a day. They had vegetable soup every day and rice for dinner three times a week. While the potatoes lasted, they had potatoes every day for breakfast. During the winter they had molasses three times a week and milk on alternate days. After May first, however, they had molasses every day until milk was again used in winter.[82]

567 165 Despite this special attention, the proportion of children in the total number of deaths on Weehaw was high. In 1856 six out of eleven deaths were of infants under one year; in 1857 thirty-three out of forty deaths were of children under three years; in 1858 twelve out of fourteen were of children under two; in 1859 fourteen out of eighteen were of children under one; in 1860 thirteen out of twenty were of children. The causes of death as listed by the planter were as follows: diarrhea, pneumonia, debility, fever, spasms, lockjaw, dysentery, convulsions, accident, cholic, worms, and teething, with the largest number dying of lockjaw.

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165 It must not be overlooked that the infant death rate among the whites was also high. Planters on St. Helena Island seem to have had as much difficulty in rearing their own children as those of their Negroes. The tombstones still standing in the cemeteries there show that parents sometimes lost four or five infants in succession. James A. Pope lost five children under six years of age

[82] *Ibid.*

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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the fears of the plantation people, making them "satisfy" with the new order. Miss Towne soon found the women appearing at her back door, shyly offering baskets of eggs in appreciation for the services she had rendered them.

Most of the Negroes Miss Towne thought to be "decidedly unhealthy" with bad teeth and general debility.[43] Their bedding and sleeping apartments were "unsuitable," and they often slept on the floor at night without a change of clothing. They did not take proper care of themselves after exposure to the weather and made little effort to prevent disease. Their medical knowledge was a combination of folk-wisdom, superstition, and facts gleaned from ante-bellum days. They insisted on bathing a patient when the tide was going out so that it might take the fever with it. In 1864 Miss Towne complained, "They keep their rooms so dark I cannot see the patients, and if I order a window opened, I find it nailed up the next time I come. The people are beginning to follow a practice which I dislike. They *will* wash the patients with strong pokeroot, and vinegar and salt."[44]

To the superintendents the family life of the people was one of the most distressing phases of the Negro community. Among the first orders which Pierce issued was one requiring that all marriages among the people be regularly performed by a minister according to law, and he strictly forbade a couple's living together until the ceremony had been pronounced. Charles Ware, assistant superintendent on Coffin's Point plantation, had to deal with several cases arising under this order. In 1862 he wrote to a friend at the North:

[43] *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, p. 22. [44] *Ibid.*, p. 122.